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TAGS: [ECON](#) [KISL](#) [MAS](#) [MO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: MOROCCO-TURKEY RELATIONS: A ROBUST AGENDA

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Classified By: POL/C Timothy Lenderking for Reasons 1.4. (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: During a recent two-hour lunch with Polcouns, Turkish Embassy First Secretary Turker Ari painted a diverse portrait of Morocco-Turkish relations, touching on a series of planned and already executed high-level visits, extensive relations between the two countries' Islamist parties (despite some gaffes on the part of the Moroccan Party for Justice and Development), with some rough patches in cooperation between Turkey and Morocco on G-8/BMENA initiatives. End Summary.

High-Level Exchanges

12. (C) Over lunch in late February, Turkish Embassy First Secretary Turker Ari outlined a vigorous series of recent

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high-level exchanges between Morocco and Turkey, coming on the heels of reciprocal visits by the two countries' prime ministers in the last two years (PM Jettou visited Turkey in April 2004, and PM Erdogan visited Morocco in March 2005). The key visits have included:

-- FAR General Bennani: Ari said that the head of Morocco's armed forces made a five-day visit to Turkey in late January 12006. The GOT "rolled out the red carpet" for Bennani. Turkey is interested in expanding arms sales to North Africa, especially in the area of communications equipment such as walkie-talkies. A delegation will visit Morocco in the near future to pursue such sales. The two countries are exploring signing a formal memorandum of understanding on military cooperation.

-- Turkey's Minister of Justice had visited recently and was impressed with the Moroccan MOJ's advances in "e-justice," which among other things allows the Ministry to track all court cases electronically, and looked to borrow some ideas from Morocco.

-- Turkey's FM planned to visit Morocco in early April. The minister was a "senior Islamist" and planned to meet with the leadership of the Islamist PJD. Ari commented as an aside that the foreign minister had not been happy with the handling of some of his recent visits by Turkish embassies.

Contacts between the Islamists

¶3. (C) Ari said that the Moroccan and Turkish Islamist parties continued to maintain good relations and close contact at senior levels. Ari agreed that the PJD, through visits to several European countries recently and to the US later this spring, was putting strong emphasis on deepening international ties. In that vein, Ari described as clumsy the PJD's recent invitation to members of a fringe Islamist party in Turkey, Saadat, to visit Morocco. This move had annoyed some Turkish party leaders, Ari said, and demonstrated the PJD's international diplomacy was not yet very mature.

G-8/BMENA Concerns

¶4. (C) On the negative side, Ari complained that, for such major players in G-8/BMENA initiatives, the Moroccans were not very cooperative when it was Turkey's turn to host events and conferences on reform. Ari said Moroccan participation at recent BMENA events in Turkey was minimal; in the February 6-7 Istanbul Conference on Women, for example, Morocco had sent only two civil society representatives (Amina Bouayach from the Moroccan Organization of Human Rights and Halima Zine el Abedine from Jousour) but no one from the government, not even a representative from the Moroccan embassy in Ankara. Ari hoped for better at an upcoming event in June, and said Turkish Ambassador Akin Algan would lobby the GOM (specifically MFA Director of Bilateral Affairs Amrani) for stronger Moroccan participation.

Trade and Tourism

¶5. (SBU) Ari noted that the free trade agreement between Turkey and Morocco went into effect on January 1, 2006, the same time as the US-Morocco FTA. Ari was not particularly impressed with the Turkish FTA, noting that the primary motivation for Turkey -- despite what some Moroccans thought -- was to harmonize Turkish legislation with the EU. The FTA is more about Turkish relations with the EU than about Morocco, Ari said.

¶6. (SBU) Ari said the volume of trade between the two countries was about half a billion dollars a year. Tourism was low, with about 22,000 Turks per year visiting Morocco and only about 5600 Moroccans visiting Turkey. Nevertheless, Turkish Airlines' three flights a week between Casablanca and Istanbul were running at 80 percent capacity, which Ari thought respectable.

Mauritania Travel

¶7. (C) Ari noted that Turkish Ambassador Algan, whose jurisdiction includes Mauritania, would be traveling in the near future to Nouakchott to assess the situation there and expected to meet Colonel Fal.

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